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## ADDRESS,

DELIVERED TO THE

*Graduates of Brown University,*

AT THE

*COMMENCEMENT,*

SEPTEMBER 5th, 1810.

—  
By ASA MESSER, D. D.  
THE PRESIDENT.  
—

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THOUGH you, young gentlemen, are now finishing your collegiate course, you are not, I hope, yet finishing your literary course. Notwithstanding the respectable progress you have already made, there is still, you must be sensible, a long way between you and the top of the hill of science. Should you stop where you now are, you would resemble those *who put the hand to the plough and look back.* Should you never make any farther progress, the progress you have already made would engender reproach rather than applause. Reproach, you very well know, is apt enough to follow those who reach not the general expectation; and it is the general expectation that those who have had liberal advantages should also have liberal attainments. But liberal attainments always suggest persevering exertion. If you possess them now, you cannot, without this, possess them long. Like the water in Tantalus' cup, your treasures of knowledge, unless often replenished, will soon waste away. In an entire neglect of study, no man can long remain

even in *statu quo*. A **NEWTON**, a **LOCKE**, a **BURKE**, a **LA PLACE** must, in this case, soon begin to fall from their envied elevation. Whether affected, therefore, by the hope of rising high, or by the fear of sinking low in the estimation of the world, you should, at any rate, devote much of your future time to the completion of the literary course you have now begun.

A moral character, however, stands high above a literary. Knowledge, indeed, combined with guilt, will always give to guilt itself a blacker hue. To the very worst imaginable image of man, to the one exhibiting him as similar as possible to the very Prince of the dungeon below, a head the most informed is as essential as a heart the most malignant. Let your other attainments be ever so respectable, they can never become a substitute for moral principle: they can never give you the rank which this will give you in the eye of the world. Wholly destitute of moral principle, you would, indeed, be wholly unworthy the esteem, the confidence and friendship of every man on earth; and, without these, what on earth can you possibly discover, which is worthy a single exertion?— Were you to fix your attention exclusively on the objects of the earth; were you, without any regard to another world, to strive to secure the greatest possible treasure in this; were you to feel, what **GOD** forbid you ever should feel, responsible only to yourselves and to your fellow-men, the voice of reason would still direct you to follow the path of truth, of justice and

benevolence ; to cherish, indeed, that moral character, which is fair, unsullied, irreproachable.

Though this would evidently be the voice of reason, I must still remind you that, in such a case, men would not be apt to follow it. DAVID HUMES are seldom found in the ranks of infidelity. Infidels in principle are ready to become profligates in practice. Affected neither by the fear or the love of GOD, nor by the hopes or fears of a future retribution, men are ready to think that "the end will sanctify the means;" and to say, "let us eat, and drink;" let us curse, and swear; let us lie, and steal; let us, at all events, gratify our passions and our appetites.—Religion, young gentlemen, religion is the great support of morality; and this consideration alone should induce you ever to revere and to follow the principles of religion. Can you, indeed, once suspect the correctness of the principles which are essential to the preservation among men of truth, of peace, of order, of justice, of sobriety, of beneficence; of principles as essential to the welfare of nations, of families and individuals, as light and heat and rain are to the progress of vegetation?—But the correctness of these principles does not depend solely on this consideration. Can you even imagine that a watch can exist without a maker, or a ship without a builder? Can you in any case allow that a man has made himself, or that a world has sprung out of nothing? Yet these are the very absurdities and contradictions, which all must virtually adopt, who deny

the being, the power and the wisdom of **GOD**. You must, therefore, accept the most important principles, the very ground-work of all religion ; or you must reject the most important principles, the very ground-work of all reasoning. You must acknowledge either that there is a **GOD**, or that nothing and something, reason and madness, black and white, ten and one are the very same.

Can you make yourselves believe that the tongue of man can change the very laws of nature ? can cure the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb ? can stop the wind, the plague, the storm, the flood ? can raise the dead ? Can you make yourselves believe that the eye of man can look through the veil which separates the present and the future time, and discern with accuracy the production of thousands and millions of events, depending, perhaps a thousand years to come, on the voluntary exercises of the soul of man ? Can you make yourselves believe that it was in the power of any man, at the time of **HOMER**, or **VIRGIL**, or even of **MILTON**, to specify the events which are this day occurring in Europe, or America ; or which are this moment occurring in this town, in this house, on that stage, in this pulpit ? Yet such is only a part of the absurd things virtually adopted by all who reject the religion generally received in this country, the religion of the blessed **IMMANUEL**. Never give any countenance, then, to the insinuation that this religion befits only the weak, the vulgar, the credulous, the ignorant !

It would be not less difficult to reconcile such an insinuation with a statement of facts, than with the deductions of reason. For a number of centuries, have not the talents, the genius, the learning of the civilized world stood principally on the side of this religion? Has not this been the case with the most celebrated philosophers, astronomers, poets, orators, historians, mathematicians? those resplendent suns in the literary heavens which have poured such a blaze of light on the eighteenth century, and given it such a lustre above the twelfth? In what corner of the world can you find a single library, I will not say a single book, which is worthy your notice, and which was not principally written by men bearing the christian name?

The original settlement of our own country, and especially of New-England, must be ascribed to the indefatigable exertions of enterprising, conscientious christians; and the subsequent cultivation and prosperity of it must be ascribed to similar exertions of similar men. To them must we look for the origin and the progress of all our schools, all our colleges, all our social libraries, and literary societies. And are not these the very stamina of our civil privileges? These precious privileges evidently rest on that elective principle which pervades all our civil establishments; and will this principle itself be worth any thing at all to a people destitute of the means of general information? Where can these means be furnished but in our literary institutions? Only let these be abolished; only

let our schools, and colleges, and all their appendages be once abolished, and the whole land, covered with the mantle of ignorance, would soon resemble those wretched lands, where the people have no voice at all, either in the election of rulers, or the enactment of laws ; where a few families, a few individuals, an aspiring villain, perhaps a raving madman, or a worthless fool holds in his hand the destinies of the nation ! On the side, therefore, of the christian religion we may place that consummate wisdom which devised and established even the system of civil policy, which so admirably distinguishes us among the nations of the earth. If then you would become the associates of the greatest, the wisest, as well as the best men, who ever have existed, or who now exist either in the old, or the new, and I might say, either in the present, or the future world, you should become the associates of the christian family ; you should become the advocates of the christian religion.

I must, however, remind you, that coercion will never enable you to promote this divine religion. To force a man to become religious would be as difficult as to force him to become intelligent, or sympathetick, or forgiving. The christian religion must be embraced either not at all, or with a ready mind.—Good will to men is a primary principle of this religion; and can good will to men be promoted by the persecution, or the slaughter of them ? Can the benevolence of the gospel feed itself on the malignity of a crusade ? Young gen-

tlemen, our holy religion will not allow you to harm, or to hate even the worst infidels in the world, even the worst enemies either of man, or of God himself. It will rather require you to love them, and to bless them, and to treat them as you wish them to treat you.—It would hence be easy to show that this religion will not allow you to make your own à measure for the faith or practice of your christian brethren ; and I exhort you never to feel, or think, or act as though God had given to you, or to any man, a monopoly of conscience, or a spirit of infallibility.

To those who possess the requisite qualifications the office of a preacher of the gospel will exhibit very many allurements. What characters can be more dignified than the ambassadours of Christ, than the workers together with God in the salvation of sinners ? What employment can be more weighty, or benevolent, than to proclaim the glorious gospel of the blessed God ; than to show to guilty men the way to everlasting life ; than to bring to a perishing world the unsearchable riches of the covenant of grace ?—Should objects like these engross your attention ; should the glory of God and the welfare of men govern your hearts ; should the gospel seem to you to be worthy of all acceptation, and should you seem to yourselves *to be called of God as was Aaron*, I should rejoice to see you devoting your lives to this blessed work ; and I would implore the God of grace to give you strength equal to your day.—Should you, however, fix your hearts on objects

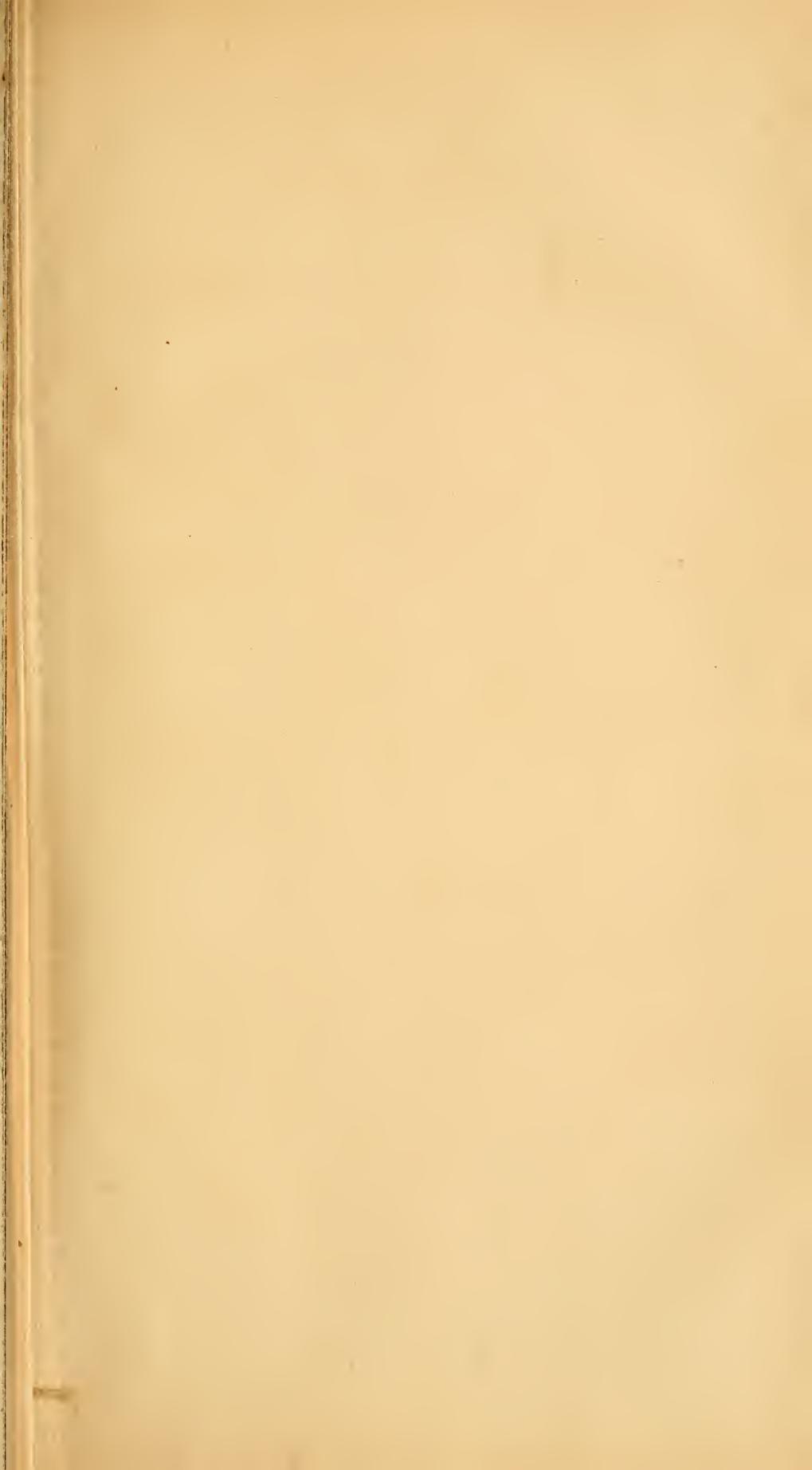
opposite to these ; on the fame, the wealth, the power, the wisdom, the grandeur, the pleasure of the world, may God in mercy keep you from waiting at the altar.

I would, in any case, exhort you not to lay up your treasure in the present world. What but shadows and bubbles are all the treasures of the present world ? If you could possess them, you might not enjoy them. Though standing on the pinnacle of human greatness, you might envy the condition of a common beggar. A President of the United States, a King of England, an Emperour of France, a ruler of the whole world might, indeed, be the most wretched man the world itself contains. O how worthless, how contemptible will all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them seem to a man on a bed of pain, in the gate of death, at the bar of God !—Whether preachers, or lawyers, or physicians, or farmers, or merchants, or mechanicks, you will still be needy, feeble, dying creatures. On no one day will you be certain of living till another. At noon encircled with all the lures of life, you may at night be encircled with all the pangs of death. Your home is in another world. There lies your great concern. There you must live forever. There, young gentlemen, lay up your treasure.—To that other world the closing scene of this day is especially fitted to turn your attention. Before the clock shall strike again I shall have finished this address ; and probably I shall never again address you as a class, until the heavens and the earth shall be no more. Before the

sun shall rise again you will be scattered abroad ; and probably you will all never meet again, until you meet, with an assembled world, at the judgment of the great day. May the God of heaven grant that you may there meet as friends, as brothers, as *the ransomed of the Lord, those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

CATALOGUE  
OF THE  
GRADUATES OF BROWN UNIVERSITY,  
SEPTEMBER 5, 1810.

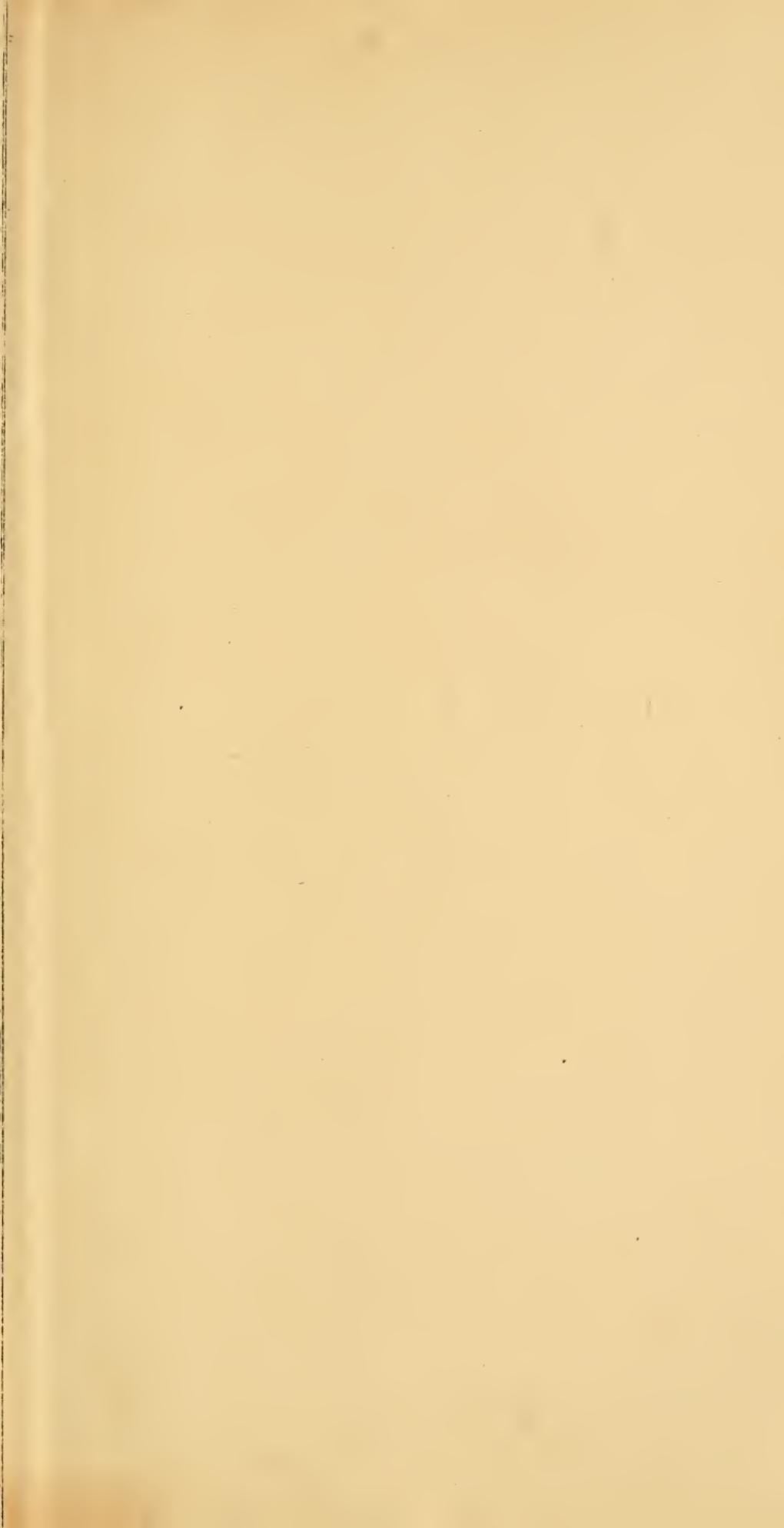
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